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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the factors which have contributed to the need for an expansion of extra-familial child care arrangements, and reports the findings of an exploratory study which investigated the decision-making process whereby parents opted for supplementary care for their children. Group interviews were conducted with parents whose children were enrolled in nursery schools, family day care homes, day care centers operated by voluntary associations, day care centers operated by the local community, and residential centers run by the state. Precipitating conditions prior to considering child care outside the home are presented first in terms of: educational and labor force participation, changes in marital status, and the psychological and emotional well-being of the parents. The decision-making process is discussed in terms of: the initial decision to have children cared for outside the home, the roles of both parents in making the decision (in the case of married couples), who parents consult in making their decision, and the subsequent selection of a placement among a variety of options. Also explored are parents' initial feelings about having their children cared for outside the home and the feedback received from others regarding their decision. (Author)

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Parental Reflections on the Child Care Decision-Making Process*

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Abstract

This paper: (1) examines the factors which have contributed to the need for an expansion of extra-familial child care arrangements, and (2) reports the findings of an exploratory study which investigated the decision-making process whereby parents opted for supplementary care for their children. Group interviews were conducted with parents whose children were enrolled in nursery schools, family day care homes, day care centers operated by voluntary associations, day care centers operated by the local community, and residential centers run by the state.

Precipitating conditions prior to considering child care outside the home are presented first in terms of: educational and labor force participation, changes in marital status, and the psychological and emotional well-being of the parents. The decision-making process is discussed in terms of: the initial decision to have children cared for outside the home, the roles of both parents in making the decision (in the case of married couples), who parents consult in making their decision, and the subsequent selection of a placement among a variety of options. Also explored are parents' initial feelings about having their children cared for outside the home and the feedback received from others regarding their decision.

To speak of changes in the structure and patterns of American family life is terrifying to some, viewed skeptically by others, and applauded by still others. In recent years child care has been a topic of heated debate among sociologists, psychologists, educators, and politicians. It is necessary, however, to explore what has precipitated the need for supplementary child care and how and why parents decide to have their children cared for outside the home. The focus of this paper will be two-fold: 1) to examine the factors which have contributed to the need for an expansion of child care arrangements outside the nuclear family; and 2) to report the findings of an exploratory study investigating the decision-making process whereby parents opt for supplementary care for their children.

The kinds of changes taking place in the American family during the 1970's are rooted in broader processes of change. The Women's Movement, demographic changes, and public policies have all affected American life in the 1970's. From its inception in the mid-1960's, the Women's Movement has posed many serious questions concerning the roles, status, and potential of women in American society. Concomitant with its influence, many women have re-evaluated the possibilities of combining a career with family life. In the past women generally achieved adult status by bearing and rearing children (Rossi, 1968). However, there is growing evidence that this may be changing. Women's participation in the labor force has been steadily increasing since the 1960's, not only for economic reasons rooted in family need for added income, but for emotional and psychological reasons within women themselves (Joffe, 1972; Suelzle, 1970). As the number of dual-career families increases, the need for adequate child care* becomes an increasingly important public policy issue.

*The term child care center will be used as shorthand for a variety of arrangements including nursery schools, day care centers, licensed homes, and preschools.

The Women's Movement may also have contributed to the growing number of women who seek higher levels of education than in the past, either before or during marriage. Women's greater academic achievement and employment opportunities may affect the marital relationship by producing a more equitable division of home maintenance and child rearing responsibilities between husbands and wives (Rossi, 1972).

Associated with the women's movement and increased employment rates among married women is a rising divorce rate. As Ross and Sawhill (1975) note, this rising divorce rate has increased the number of female-headed households and, therefore, the number of women who must return to the labor force in order to support themselves and their children. These women, in turn, must find others to care for their children while they work.

The decreasing availability of an extended family has also helped to create a need for extra-familial arrangements (Levitan and Alderman, 1975). During the nineteenth century, children generally remained in their parents' household until they married. Even then, the newly-wed couple lived nearby their parents, often assisting them financially through their old age. In the twentieth century, "the increase in life expectancy and in longevity, earlier age at marriage, and the decline in fertility have made possible an extended overlap in the life span of family members and have reduced family size" (Haraven, 1976). The notion that the extended family is "dying" is really an overly dramatized, emotionally-laden way of stating that the parent/adult child relationship has shifted from an economic to a psychological base due to increased geographic mobility. This mobility means adults may live further away from their parents and may see them less often, but by no means implies that emotional bonds have weakened. If parents no longer have access to a familial support system for child-rearing

purposes, they must seek alternative arrangements. What has changed, in other words, is not primarily a weakening of family ties, but the more widespread geographic mobility of young adults in response to changing requirements of their occupations.

Still another important determinant of extra-familial child care is the historical pattern of social policy. Social policy is significant in that it can impede or facilitate the availability and desirability of child care through funding and eligibility requirements. It also implicitly functions to form attitudes among members of society. For example, no one would criticize expenditures from public coffers for such necessities as sewer maintenance or fire protection. Child care, however, has not been historically viewed as necessary to healthy family functioning, nor as an appropriate area for public expenditure. Even today, extra-familial child-rearing support systems are often considered a sign of parental ineptness, additionally bearing connotations of welfare.*

Historical memories are very short in this area, for there are precedents for the government funding of child care. Minor federal involvement supporting day care began as part of the WPA in the 1930's.+ The Lanham Act of 1941 was "the first significant full-day group-care program (designed) to provide care for the children of mothers who were desperately needed in the war economy" (Bourne, 1972:272). When the war ended and men returned home, the program came to an abrupt end. Since that time, federal funds for child care have been almost exclusively tied to the welfare rolls. The Head Start programs of the

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*For a succinct summary of the socio-historical policy trends of child care in the United States see Bourne (1972) and Steinfels (1973).

+Because nursery schools during the 1920's and 1930's were associated with Dewey's psychoanalytic movement, they were more acceptable to the American middle-class public.

1960's, in an attempt to provide compensatory education for children perceived and labelled as deprived, further reinforced the association of child care with welfare both in social policy and in the minds of the American public.

These components of the growing need for supplementary child care are factors in the decision-making process of individual couples who are faced with the problem of combining school or work with the care of their children. Social constraints and opportunities contribute to the decision to have children cared for outside of the home. Proximity to the extended family, marital status, income, and the emotional and psychological well-being of parents all influence the decision-making process. Currently parents can choose a variety of supplementary child care arrangements and families often utilize various caretaking situations over time.

Although millions of parents and children no longer rely on the traditional pattern of mothers serving as sole caretakers, no research has been done to date on how and why parents initially decide to have their children cared for outside the home. Particularly from the standpoint of social policy, knowledge of the range of people who want, need, and use supplementary child care, and the factors which influenced their decision, is important. Parents have strong feelings about the care their children receive and are generally quite sensitive to the reactions they receive from others. Perhaps with the destigmatization and increasing acceptance of child care alternatives, fewer raw nerves and raised eyebrows will accompany the decision to have one's child cared for outside of the home. In the interim, research will enable us, in the future, to chart this process of destigmatization.

There is reason to believe, then, that the 1970's may be an important time of transition in child-rearing patterns. First, if married women of all income

brackets continue to work, they will need to have supplementary care available for their children during their working hours. Given the rising divorce rate and subsequent return of women to the labor force, divorced female household heads will also need to make supplementary child care arrangements. Geographic mobility also precludes many families from depending on members of their extended families as caretakers, contributing to the need for an alternative form of child care. The combination of these factors implies that utilization of group child care arrangements will become more widespread in American society.

Research Methods*

The study explores the processes by which parents decide to have their children cared for on a regular basis by someone in addition to themselves. To assure a range of respondents, parents were interviewed whose child care arrangements included: nursery schools, family day care homes, day care centers operated by voluntary associations, day care centers operated by the local community, and residential centers operated by the state. The sample includes arrangements designed for normal children as well as special centers for children with handicapping conditions. All but one of the twelve centers are located in Evanston, Illinois (Evanston is located just north of Chicago and has a population of approximately 80,000 people). The twelfth is a residential center for severely and profoundly retarded children which includes Evanston in its encatchment area.

Interviews with parents took place between the end of June and the beginning of September, 1976. The sampling procedures were done in two steps. Access to parents was obtained by first contacting the program directors whose facilities

*An extended discussion of the research procedures used in the study can be found in Suelzle, Katz, and Gans (1976).

were associated with the Evanston Committee for Community Coordinated Child Care. Once the program director consented to have his/her center participate in the study, parents received a letter (usually by way of their children) explaining the project and including an expression-of-interest form. A parent interested in participating in the interview signed the form and returned it to the director of their child's center. The researchers were then given the names and telephone numbers of interested parents. These parents were subsequently contacted to arrange a convenient date and time for the interview.

Parents whose children attended the same center were interviewed in groups of two to five persons with other parents whose children also attended that center. The twelve group interviews involved forty-two people: 29 white females, 6 black females, 5 white males and 2 black males. The sample included adoptive and biological parents, parents of children with handicapping conditions as well as parents of normal children, and interracial as well as racially homogeneous marriages. One respondent was a grandmother. Respondents ranged in age from 21 to 50 years, and in education from high school graduates to Ph.D's. Family income before taxes ranged from $6,000 to over $25,000 per year. Approximately half of the sample identified themselves as Protestants; the remainder included approximately equal numbers of Jewish and Roman Catholic adults. Over two-thirds described themselves as politically liberal. Occupations included: counselor, clerical worker, editor of a journal, high school teacher, housewife, nurse, pediatrician, secretary, speech pathologist, student, supervisor in a manufacturing plant, and university professor. The range of characteristics indicates that the sample is certainly not one of a culturally or economically homogeneous group. This diversity is deemed vitally important in an exploratory study to elicit variability in the processes by which parents

decide to have their children cared for on a regular basis by someone in addition to themselves.

Precipitating Conditions

Many factors stimulate the initial discussion and decision about supplementary child care. They can be divided into the categories of voluntary and involuntary factors. Voluntary factors include: the mother's return to the labor force when her income is not crucial to the family's subsistence, her desire to further her education, the need for a "release valve" from the children, the parents' perception that their children need to interact socially with a larger peer group, or some combination of the above. Involuntary factors include: marital disruption requiring the woman to return to work to support herself and her child(ren), the mother returning to the labor force because her income is necessary to supplement the family income, or the child's need for educational stimulation, or physical or emotional therapy from others with specialized skills.

Non-working mothers who use child care as a release valve view child care as complementing their needs as well as the needs of their children. One said, "He had been a very difficult toddler and he and I needed some separation." Another parent said, "I thought she needed to be going five days a week; and I needed her to be going five days a week. So it was then that I began investigating."

There are women who work before giving birth and who enjoy and accept their dual status as a working mother. The role of housewife is simply not fulfilling for them. One mother said, "I've always worked or gone to school. And it was always important, how to best find care for him while I'm working or in school." The mother of a 2-year-old boy describes her decision in a

matter of fact

> Well, I knew for certain when we were moving, I knew then that I was going to work because I had been home for 4 years; I figured I could find someone to take care of him, you know, a competent baby sitter, I didn't worry about that part. And I didn't think about, oh you know, the advantages and disadvantages of working; I knew I wanted to. So it wasn't a decision on my part, I was going to work so I had to find a sitter.

Virtually all mothers regard child care as providing both a release valve and a prerequisite to their return to the labor force. One said, "I was going crazy and I had decided that it was definitely a mistake for me to be home full time. We had just moved into a house, and I wanted to do something on a part-time basis, I thought, to help do things for the new house." Another woman who voluntarily returned to work explains:

> I had just always worked and a job terminated when I was about three months pregnant so I decided to stay home and have the baby and I joined the ranks of the crazies along about the seventh month of being home after she was born. The novelty of being home and being a mother and having all this time wore thin for me and I just needed to get involved with something. I was nursing which was sort of a sticky issue for me as to, you know, how I was going to make this transition from her needs to my needs and I got accepted into school and had the commitment of going back in September and midway in August she just decided she had had enough and she stopped nursing and I went off to school in September, and it was just fine.

When marital disruption is the primary impetus for placing the child in a center, the description of factors contributing to the decision for child care are generally quite succinct, as illustrated by one woman's comments: "I was separating from my husband and I knew I had to support myself and my daughter. That was my reason."

If the mother's income is crucial to the family's subsistence, the expenditure on child care does not obviate her return to the labor force. One woman recounts:

> My husband lost his job just before the baby was born, and he had been unhappy in the occupation he was before, he went and took testing at I.I.T. and he got the idea that he should go into a new field which he went back to school to go into, and we spent all of our savings and

went into debt to do that and had no income, and so by the time S___ was four months old we needed the money very badly and I really didn't have any trouble making the decision at that point that I should return. I didn't have to return until six months as far as the maternity leave was concerned, but we were in need of the money so much that I made the decision to go then.

Overall then, parents place their children in child care centers for a variety of reasons, whether they be the psychological and emotional well-being of the parent and/or child, the result of economic constraints, or a change in marital status. When the decision involves voluntary factors, women express discontent with the homemaker role and the need for self-fulfillment in addition to family life. For families in which involuntary factors contribute to the decision to return to the labor force, the decision is considered inevitable; the woman has to financially support or help support her family. Regardless of whether the precipitating conditions are voluntary or involuntary, parents experience the need for extra-familial child care.

Although the mother was the sole or primary pre-center caretaker, the majority of parents describe a variety of arrangements they use to supplement parental care before the children are enrolled in child care centers. In dual-career and single-parent families pre-center care is often "patchwork", involving several short-term arrangements. Arrangements are generally quite informal with individuals such as babysitters, neighbors, and housekeepers. Parents bring their children to the homes of neighbors or babysitters or have the neighbors or sitters come to their home. Occasionally family members (outside the nuclear family) help with child care, though this is infrequent and rarely occurs on a regular basis. Most parents in the sample do not live near anyone from their extended families. Those who do opt against asking their parents for regular assistance, for example because the grandparents were quite elderly

or because of intergenerational differences about appropriate methods of child rearing.

One father describes the frenetic existence he and his wife led before their child was placed in a center.

> My wife and I worked our schedules out in such a way that when L___, my oldest son, was very young, one of the two of us would be home at all times. It was really an incredible logistics problem because I was a student at N.Y.U. at downtown New York, and she was a masters student at Rutgers in Newark, New Jersey, and we had a single car. So, she'd race home from a class, leave the motor running, and I'd run down and say "Alright, I've done this and this with the kids," and on the way I'd get going and she'd go up with L___. And then the following fall I started teaching, which took a lot more time and we knew that with some money coming in, that we needed some support. Also during that year, the year that I was finishing up my graduate work at N.Y.U., my wife gave birth to R___ (second child, daughter). I was finishing my degree and M____ (wife) was on hers and I was teaching at night at another location. So it had been this kind of care. And with me kind of moving away from the pure graduate studies into teaching as well, we had a girl come in who was Spanish-speaking from South Bronx. It was my wife and I who shared the responsibilities in the incipient stages and then at the same time we brought somebody into the house to take care of our youngest child and that time, put L___ in a program outside the school half the time and then the other half this Spanish woman would take care of him.

Parents who experience such informal patchwork arrangements regard group child care options as a more desirable situation. Aside from offering the child creative stimulation and a chance to socialize with other children and adults, parents find child care centers more reliable and dependable than their previous arrangements. This is not to say that all parents are dissatisfied with their pre-center experiences. Rather, many parents find their children "outgrow" the custodial care situation. As one parent said:

> (Our daughter) was very happy there, but when she was about three we began to feel that she needed more contact with kids her own age, less protection and more group situations and stimulation, and less indulgence.

The respondents as a whole do not reveal a modal age when their child was first cared for outside the home. Children ranged in age from one month to 4¼ years old when they first experienced such care on a regular basis. Approximately two-thirds of the children in our sample were under 2½ years of age when first cared for outside the home. Parents, whose children are under six months of age when placed in a center, do so largely for economic reasons (i.e., the mother's income is needed by the family), or due to marital disruption which necessitates the mother's return to work. Parents who place their children in centers when the children are between the ages of three and four and a half, are generally economically better off and regard placement as a preschool experience to encourage peer socialization. Regardless of the specific reasons for placing their children outside the home for care, parents of all incomes experienced a need for extra-parental assistance in caring for their preschool-aged children.

The Decision-Making Process

A description of the decision-making process involves a complex unravelling of situations, events and needs. This process includes: the initial decision to have children cared for outside the home, the roles of both parents in making the decision (in the case of married couples), the people parents consult in making their decision, and the subsequent selection of a placement among a variety of options. The decision-making process also extends to the parents' feelings about their decision immediately afterward, and the reactions to their decision which they receive from others. Such feelings and reactions have the potential for changing the decision although this did not, in fact, occur with any members of our sample.

When asked, "Who made the final decision to have the child cared for outside the home?" the parents overlap their responses with the decision involving the selection of a specific center. When the choice of a center is an issue, the majority of parents say that the mother does the "leg work". Although the actual decision for child care may be an inter-spouse decision, the search for and choice of a center is in large part the mother's responsibility. Only slightly over half of the women in intact marriages make the decision jointly with their husbands. All single parents indicate that they make the final decision, both in terms of having their children cared for by someone other than themselves and in the selection of a specific center.

Despite variations in the decision-making process, the parents interviewed unanimously agree that their decision does not occur haphazardly or "in vacuo". Married women's descriptions of their husband's interest and involvement in the decision-making process vary greatly. Some husbands feel that the child's care is primarily the mother's responsibility or are rather indifferent to the decision, as indicated by the following comments:

> (My husband) really hasn't shown much interest. He feels it's my responsibility because I'm the mother, I'm the one responsible 'til they're 18 (years old), then he might take over. He says I know what's good care and what isn't.
>
> I discussed it with my husband but it was pretty much left up to me to make the decision.
>
> I made the decision on my own I would say. I told my husband the criteria that I was using and what I had discovered about the school that I selected, but in fact I was the one who had gone to the schools and it was very hard for him to participate in the decision since he obviously couldn't have been there.
>
> My husband just pretty much took my opinion of the whole thing.
>
> I think it's really a mother's decision, personally. Others can help but I think it's really the mother who decides.

Though fewer in number, other husbands actively participate in the decision-making process:

> My husband and I spent an awful lot of time talking it through, you know, all the virtues of it, how wonderful it was going to be, and it really was wonderful until it really happened and some of the realities started sinking in.

> I was the one who felt guilty, but my husband was 100% for it; he saw what I had gone through for the two years and that I was so unhappy staying at home, and he thought it was a terrible idea, because I had been very happy teaching.

Neighbors, friends, and family are for the most part "secondary" consultants, since they are informed after a couple (or the mother alone) tentatively decides to seek an outside center. These people can sometimes refer parents to particular child care facilities in the area. Parents who are new to the area ask neighbors about "good" child care facilities in the community. When the mother's or father's parents live in the area, they too are usually consulted. When extended family and friends have little or no information about child care facilities, the process of locating care becomes quite complex. For example, one mother describes her experiences in the following way:

> I ran an ad in the Evanston paper almost every week, all summer long, and I talked to the 4c's (Community Coordinated Child Care), and I talked to all the ministers in north Evanston trying to find leads in their churches. I put up signs on grocery store bulletin boards, and I went around seeing people and saying, "Uh, do you know anybody?", and I called all the neighbors that I'd been introduced to in the neighborhood and the lady that we had bought the house from had given me a list of names to call and all that.

The time span between the decision for child care and finding an arrangement suitable for the parents' and child's needs also varies tremendously. One respondent said, "I started thinking about day care a year before I used it because I was thinking about when my child would be ready to go into day care because I wanted to go back to work." Parents generally take six months or less to arrange for their child's care. Parents who find suitable day care situations within one or two weeks say they "just kind of fell into it" by talking

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with friends and neighbors. Respondents who have recently moved need to make child care arrangements quickly due to job constraints. In other cases the search for child care is undertaken in a more relaxed fashion.

Birth Order

During the interview parents were asked if they had children other than the child on which the interview focused. Slightly under half of the parents indicated that the child presently at a child care center was either their oldest or only child. The other parents, without exception, said that the child's older sibling(s) also experienced pre-school child care. Although this finding may be unique to this sample, it is tentatively suggested that parents who either have no alternative to placing their child outside of the home, and/or who are pleased with their older children's pre-school care are willing to have their younger children experience child care outside the home. In this sample, without exception, all the parents regard their children's present care situation as a positive experience in which they see their children as happy, growing, and learning people. This phenomenon needs to be studied further before generalizations can be made concerning the effects of birth order on child care users.

Parents' Initial Feelings and Reactions from Others

Making a decision is one thing. Living with it is quite another. Parents vividly recall their initial feelings and the attitudes of others when first implementing their decision to place their child in group care.

A spectrum of emotions emerge when parents are asked how they initially feel about their decision. Parents range from feeling quite positive about their arrangements, through others who are more ambivalent, to still others who initially have quite negative feelings. Typically these reactions are strongest the day the parent leaves the child at the center for the first time.

Parents who feel positively about their decision describe themselves as feeling comfortable, or as experiencing a sense of relief. The mother of a three-year-old said, "I generally felt very good that she was old enough to be on her own and feel good about it." Anotner woman said, "I had no problems, no doubts." A third mother said, "I just felt very comfortable, very elated... and enriched for having been out, and therefore I felt the next day, when I was home with her during the better part of the day, that I was a better mother for it." A father explains:

> As I'm thinking right now the word that comes to mind is relief. Yeah, I felt relief at the fact that I could get out of the house and do my thing, but I also felt guilt, I mean to some extent, or a separation, that I guess most wives would describe, but I think because I involved myself so much my feelings were very similar.

Parents usually express at least some ambivalent feelings. The balance between the parent's needs and interests and the needs and interests of the child are often somewhat precarious:

> I was very anxious to get on with my own life outside of the home but it was accompanied by a great deal of guilt. It still is, I won't shake that.
>
> I didn't have any guilt feelings or anything like that, but I could sense some amount of trepidation just from the mere fact that I was taking my baby, you know, to let somebody else watch.
>
> It was nervousness at first but then after the first couple of weeks I was more relaxed and worried less.
>
> It was a very scary feeling because I'd never had, you know, it was my first child.

Separation from the child is more difficult for some parents, accompanied by guilt, sadness, or even loneliness. One said, "I was really torn. I still thought that maybe she should stay with my mother, and I was torn between which was really the right thing to do both for her and myself." Another described herself as "depressed and guilty; the regular stuff I think every mother goes through. I felt terrible. What am I doing? That's what I felt like, it was terrible. It took me longer to adjust than it did her. I'm still adjusting." The mother of a one-year-old said, "I felt bad at first, I had the guilt complex as a working mother with a child in school; I'm neglecting my child, I should be home with her, all this -- you know, and then I started to feel really confident because I had made day care changes, I had made excellent choices and they were providing the love and the guidance with my consent, with my cooperation, so I felt very much a part of her day care."

In summary, the initial impact of separation from the child is more difficult for some parents than for others, but when they see their children growing, learning and feeling happy, these reservations diminish and the parents become more comfortable with their decision.

Parents receive a great deal of feedback from friends, workmates, and especially from their own parents regarding their decision for child care. Respondents are quite sensitive to criticism and feel their competence as parents is under attack. Perhaps because child care is not yet widely accepted by the American public, many parents report that they are made to feel quite deviant.

Although workmates' and other women's reactions are not taken as personally as their own parents' reactions, they still merit noting. One woman said:

> My problem is with other mothers. At Christmas time an old woman came up to me while we were at a Christmas party and wanted to know, "How could you do that?" And it was a real put-down at the time. As a working mother you're very sensitive to other people's comments; you have to prove yourself to everyone, that you're a "Supermom". For example, if your children are sick or if there's a bake sale, people give you a comment that's supposed to let you off the hook, like, "Oh, yes, of course, you work . . . " So I tell them that I can do whatever it is in addition to working and that I can do them both just fine.

Attitudes held by workmates are considered by many parents to be conservative and uninformed. One said, "The place where I work is so reactionary that even people in their 20's ask me if I really leave my son all day long and don't I give him lunch 'til I get home." Another woman explains, "At the time, we were living in Jackson, Tennessee and nice women in Jackson, Tennessee simply don't work; 'Oh, a speech therapist? Well, maybe that's okay.' It was a really tacky attitude."

The most vivid and emotionally charged feelings come from parents' parents. Even if members of the extended family are not living nearby, they are informed of the decision, and generally have strong feelings about their grandchildren being in child care centers. Distance does not diminish communication of negative views from the grandparents.

Adults, whose mothers are highly educated or worked while their children were growing up, receive the most positive comments and support regarding the decision to place the grandchild in a child care center.

> My mother, when she heard that I was going back to work said hooray, you know, I wanted to do that for many years while you kids were young but it just wasn't acceptable at that time. And she said that she thought it was an excellent idea and she too had gone crazy when we were at home, my sister and myself. And had it been more acceptable, and more of her friends gone back to work, she said she would have been one of the first. My mother is college educated and had to give up her job and typically, when she got married and had a family right away and she said that she thought it was an excellent idea. So I got support from my parents and from my husband.

> My parents live in another state but my mother happened to be visiting when I first saw (the center), and I felt pleased that she could be there with me and see the place and then never bother me about it because she could see how good a place it was. I think it's very nice to have the support of other members of the family who approve of what you are doing and approve of the place that they're in. It's just nice to have that support.

More often, however, respondents received quite negative comments from their own parents. This may be mitigated by very supportive comments from the spouse's parents.

> My mother thinks that it's the worst thing that I could ever do and keeps reminding me of that constantly.

> My in-laws are supportive of anything that I ever choose to do as is my father. My mother generally tends to not support whatever it is I do so I don't know that her kind of inuendos were specific or whether it was just her tendency to kind of not be in favor of whatever it is I'm doing. She was very traditional in that she stayed home always, always, always. She never left the home hardly, so I imagine that was a little bit hard for her to understand.

> My parents feel very negatively. D's (husband's) parents are different, but they're just different in general. Once my parents saw that it was working out okay, they felt better about it, but they let me know that they don't want to hear about it; they let me know in no uncertain terms. I had to prove myself even to them.

Respondents took their parents' views seriously. The comments are a challenge, an impetus for re-evaluating the decision.

> We had occasion on Thanksgiving to go to New York which is where my parents live. It became clear over dinner that my husband was expressing some grievances and some misgivings about this whole thing and my father wanted to know just one thing, and his one thing was basically, "What's more important your husband and your child or you?" And I said, "Me", which was the wrong answer. I followed that up by saying that I felt like a better mother and a better wife all around just by being more fulfilled as a person, and therefore I felt that I couldn't miss in the long run; that everybody would benefit from it. My father became enraged and put a permanent dent, probably, in the dining room table with his hand coming down, and said, "If that's the way you feel, if you feel your needs to be more important than the child's then you and I

haven't got anything to talk about anymore." And we didn't talk about it for a year. There wasn't a lot of support, you know, there was but there wasn't, and it was a mixed bag both in sorting out the mixed messages and in keeping it kind of straight as to what I wanted to do and why I was doing it and what price I was willing to pay for it. So I have very vivid recollections, it's really imbedded in my mind.

My mother really just made me feel terrible, I felt bad. It's good though, you know, when someone puts something in there that's not how you feel and then you've got to tear everything all apart and put it back together again and the second time you put it together you may have put it together better, you know, you may feel better than you did the first time because you thought it all out. What I do, I just say "O.K., regroup".

All in all, the decision-making process involves a complex and diverse range of issues, making each parent and each couple somewhat idiosyncratic in their decision-making. At this stage in the research, it would be instructive and fruitful to inquire further into the intricacies of the decision-making process. Income and marital status are important variables, but not necessarily more important than the emotional and psychological well-being of parents and children. None of the parents consider their child's well-being as a secondary issue. They are all very concerned that their child receive the best care possible.

Conclusion

Child care in the 1970's is both a necessary and viable child-rearing alternative. As women increasingly participate in the labor force, the need for high quality child care becomes an increasingly important issue. As more middle class women spend time pursuing interests outside the home and place their children in child care centers, "day care" may lose its welfare connotations with its associated stigma of parental incompetence. Arrangements which serve the needs and interests of both parents and children of all races and income brackets are increasingly necessary. Geographical mobility limits access to members of the extended family as full- or part-time caretakers, thus contributing to the need for alternative

child care arrangements. As older women remain in the labor force along with their younger married daughters, grandmothers become less available for child care even when the two generations reside in the same community. In addition, many older women are pleased to be free of child care responsibility and do not welcome regular responsibility for grandchildren even if they are not employed themselves.

Although the decision to place children outside the home is a complex and often anxiety-producing process, parental feelings of guilt and accusations of irresponsibility should diminish as child care outside the home becomes part of normal child-rearing expectations. In the future the 1970's may be regarded as a decade in which families began to experiment and explore alternative forms of child-rearing, ultimately creating happier and more stimulating home environments.

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